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TEL. 36 71 30 · CABLES OIKOUMENE U.S. ENQUIRIES : WCC, 475, RIVERSIDE DRIVE, NEW YORK 27: TEL. RIVERSIDE 9-4887

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WCC Accepts Russian Church and Others

(New Delhi) - Twenty-three churches - 18 Protestant, four Orthodox and one Anglican - were voted into membership by the World Council of Churches at its Third Assembly here today.

Heading the list, from the standpoint of numerical strength, is the Orthodox Church of Russia, whose membership is estimated to be between 25 and 50 million.

Others accepted include the Orthodox Churches of Rumania, Bulgaria, and Poland, and two Chilean Pentecostal churches. The latter are the first of the Pentecostal tradition to join the World Council.

The vote on each of the 23 applicants, according to an interim report from the tellers, easily surpassed the two-thirds majority required for admission. In accordance with the WCC constitution, each member church had one vote, regardless of the size of its delegation. A detailed tally was not ready when the business session adjourned at mid-day.

After the written ballot had been taken, two American churches of Eastern European origin announced that they had abstained from voting on the Russian Orthodox application.

Approval of the applications - the largest number dealt with by the Council at one meeting - brought its membership total to 198. At the close of the morning session, the attending delegation heads of the new member churches were called forward and given their Assembly badges.

The Russian Church is the largest church in the Orthodox communion, but its officials said an exact membership figure could not be given. The church reports 73 bishoprics, 30,000 priests and 20,000 parishes inside the USSR.

Among other new affiliates, the Rumanian Orthodox Church claims over 13 million members. Previously, the World Council member reporting the largest membership was the Methodist Church of the United States, with about 10 million.

Eleven of the churches received here - nearly half the total - are located in Africa. Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the WCC, noted that since the Second Assembly in 1954 its roster of churches in Africa has risen from 13 to 30.

Recording their abstention in the vote on the application of the Russian Church are the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America and the Hungarian Reformed Church in America, whose spokesmen made statements explaining their position.

Whether there were other abstentions was not immediately known. The preliminary announcement on the balloting outcome merely reported that 150 churches had voted. Not all the 175 churches that were World Council members when the Assembly opened have sent delegates.

No speeches or statements were permitted before the vote was taken, but several delegates spoke afterwards, expressing their support for the acceptance of the Russian Church.

They were Archbishop Athenagoras of Thyateira (domiciled in London), who spoke on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; the Very Rev. Ignatius of Hazim of Beirut, speaking for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch; the Rev. Prof. Hamilcar Alivisatos of Athens, representing the Church of Greece; and the Rev. Prof. Werner F. A. Kuppers of Bonn, for the Old Catholic Church in Germany.

Earlier, in presenting the applications for vote, Dr. Visser 't Hooft said the WCC Central Committee was "convinced that for the sake of the Church of Christ it is important that fellowship should be established between the churches of Russia and the other churches."

"A tremendous opportunity is offered to us", he said, "the opportunity to ensure that a real spiritual dialogue shall take place between the Eastern churches and the churches which have their origin in the West."

He called the affiliation of the four Orthodox churches "a major event in the history of the ecumenical movement - an event to which we have been looking forward ever since in 1947 the (World Council) Provisional Committee made its first approach to the Orthodox Church of Russia."

Of the 11 African churches, two each are found in South Africa, the Cameroons and Tanganyika, and one each in Rhodesia, Uganda, Gabon, Nigeria, and the Congo.

Other parts of the world represented in the new group are New Caledonia, Pakistan, Trinidad, New Hebrides, Samoa and the United States. Dr. Visser 't Hooft pointed out that this was the first time the Council had had applications from churches in the islands of the Pacific.

Confessionally, the approved churches consisted of five Presbyterian, four Orthodox, three Lutheran, three Evangelical, two Congregationalist, two Pentecostal, one United, one Moravian, one Baptist, and one Anglican churches.

Before their applications were acted upon, the churches had expressed their agreement with the WCC's stated basis for membership. Churches in the Council "accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour".

The churches admitted, listed in the order they applied, are as follows:

The United Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia (16,209 members); Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile (10,000); Moravian Church in the Western Cape Province (30,000); Eglise Evangelique en Nouvelle-Caledonie et aux iles Loyaute (15,600); Union des Eglises Baptistes du Cameroun (15,000); the Orthodox Church of Russia.

Also, United Presbyterian Church of Pakistan (125,000); the Church of the Province of Uganda and Ruanda-Urundi (1,500,000); Presbyterian Church in the Cameroons (72,618); the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad (25,000); the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America or Suomi Synod (35,589); Mision Iglesia Pentecostal (Chile) (10,000); Bulgarian Orthodox Church (5,967,992); Eglise Evangelique du Gabon (20,000); the Bantu Congregational Church in South Africa (12,000); the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (15,292).

Also, Rumanian Orthodox Church (13,000,000); Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of North Western Tanganyika (52,933); Eglise Evangelique Manianga Matadi (Congo) (28,099); Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides (12,000); Usambara-Digo Lutheran Church (Tanganyika) (32,150); Orthodox Church of Poland (400,000); and the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (67,735).

EPS, Geneva


Christian Witness Must Be Specific, Devanandan Says

(New Delhi) - The Christian witness will make an impact on a world confronted by "manifold revolution" only if it is free of "vague generalities" and is addressed to concrete contemporary situations, one of Asia's leading Christian scholars said here November 20.

Dr. Paul D. Devanandan, director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, in Bangalore, India told the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches that such a witness must "express more fully in human relations God's will for peace, justice, equality and freedom on earth".

"But Christians can do this only if they are willing to cross all frontiers in their relations with one another by putting loyalty to their common Lord above all other loyalties", he declared.

"The Church can penetrate the vastness of its secular environment and fulfil its mission only when it sets forth in its local expression the visible marks of genuine and dynamic community", he said.



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"The crucial role of the Christian layman in the missionary witness of the Church needs to be recognized", he said. "There is still so much of the professional in the Church's ministry which alienates the common folk in the farm, the factory and the market place."

If the Gospel is to be intelligible and relevant to the common man, he said, Christians must accompany their Lord and meet "modern man where he is in his world of work, his family life, his leisure time, taking his secular involvement seriously".

"There in his work-a-day world", he said, "we should learn to meet and talk together as men, as contemporary men, with the pressure of secularism upon us, with poverty for many a paramount and endless worry, with problems of choice to face daily, with a crying need to find some meaning in our existence."

The fact that Christians "confront a different world from that of our fathers" is clearly seen in the rapid rise of Asian and African nationalism, the mounting tension created by the East-West struggle, and ever increasing knowledge which now extends to outer space, Dr. Devanandan declared.

"Behind the attraction for communism for many in Asia and Africa today and the bitter opposition to any pretence of colonialism, there is still the fear that the white races will never shed their assumptions of superiority whether it stems from biology, culture or more rapid progress in historical time", he said.

EPS, Geneva

Takenaka Asks Church To Abandon Old Patterns

(New Delhi) - A Japanese Christian leader told the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches that the churches should be as concerned with the prevention of social ills as they are with their cure.

Dr. Masao Takenaka, of Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan, said that action should be directed toward the cause of social disease and injustice, and "in the formation of social policy and of structures which will provide the basis for the healthy development of human personality".

Equally, he said, the churches must be flexible enough to revamp traditional service programmes to meet changing world needs. Dr. Takenaka said concern with causes should not mean that the churches concentrate all their work in social action programmes and shut down traditional programmes.

Rather, he said, it means a recognition that changing world conditions have opened up "vast new areas" for service. This is particularly true in countries in which the governments are taking over service programmes originally pioneered by church and other voluntary agencies, he said.

"What we need is not the static continuation of the old-established patterns, but to find out where and how the forms of voluntary service are most urgently needed."

Christian social workers, he added, should be "mobile tent-dwellers, rather than rigid keepers of buildings".

In this reassessment of needs, he emphasized, the laity should play a vital role as "the ambassadors of the Church to perform the service of the Church through their ordinary secular life to the world".

EPS, Geneva

Sittler Addresses Assembly on Unity Theme

(New Delhi) - Dr. Joseph A. Sittler, Jr., professor of systematic theology at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, delivered an address entitled, "Called to Unity", at a general session of the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi.

"The problem forced upon us by the events of the present decade is not soluble by the covert dualism of nature and grace. At a certain period in Christian thought and practical life this dualism worked itself out in the dualism of church and world, of spiritual and temporal. But the time when Christian theology and Christian life could operate with such a view of things is long past. The view was never appropriate to the organic character of biblical speech; in the present state of man's knowledge in all areas it has become unintelligible.

"It is now excruciatingly clear that Christ cannot be a light that lightest every man coming into the world, if he is not also the light that falls upon the world into which every man comes.

". . .The root-pathos of our time is the struggle by the peoples of the world in many and various ways to find some principle, order or power which shall be strong enough to contain the raging '. . .thrones, dominions, principalities' which restrict and ravage human life.

"If, to this longing of all men everywhere, we are to propose 'Him of whom, and through whom, and in whom are all things', then that proposal must be made in redemptive terms that are forged in the furnace of man's crucial engagement with nature as both potential to blessedness and potential to hell.

"Our vocabulary of praise has become personal, pastoral, too purely spiritual, static. We have not affirmed as inherent in Christ - God's proper man for man's proper selfhood and society - the world political, the world economical, the world aesthetic, and all other commanded orderings of actuality which flow from the ancient summons to tend this garden of the Lord. When atoms are disposable to the ultimate hurt then the very atoms must be reclaimed for God and his will.

"If, now we put together the threat to nature and a christology whose scope is as endless as that threat is absolute, do we, perhaps, gain a fresh and urgent vision of the call of God to the unity of the Church, and some help towards its definition and obedience?

"It has always been within the clutch of a definite historical threat, or necessity, or a sheer intolerable malaise that the Church has found her teaching voice. . .Doctrines are evoked, clarified, refined, given force and precision within the challenge of exact circumstances. The facts of history are the exciters of insight; the nature of the moment's need engenders the doctrine to serve and bless it.

"The Church is both thrust and lured toward unity. The thrust is from behind and within; it is grounded in God's will and promise. The lure is God's same will and power operating upon the Church from the needs of history within which she lives her life. . .The care of the earth, the realm of nature as a theatre of grace, the ordering of the thick, material procedures that make available to or deprive men of bread and peace - these are christological obediences before they are practical necessities.

"The Church has found a melancholy number of ways to express her variety. She has found fewer ways to express her unity. But if we are indeed called to unity, and if we can obey that call in terms of a contemporary christology expanded to the dimensions of the New Testament vision, we shall perhaps obey into fuller unity. For in such obedience we have the promise of the Divine blessing. This radio-active earth, so fecund and so fragile, is His creation, our sister, and the material place where we meet the brother in Christ's light. Ever since Hiroshima the very term light has ghastly meanings. But ever since creation it has had meanings glorious; and ever since Bethlehem meanings concrete and beckening." EPS, Geneva

Opening Worship Service at Assembly

(New Delhi) - The Christian Church was summoned to "make a radical break from purely Western ways of thought", and "to do in Asia what first-century Christians did in the Greek world" at the opening worship and thanksgiving service of the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The challenge was contained in a sermon delivered by U Ba Hmyin of Burma, secretary of the Burma Baptist Churches Union.

The service, held in a specially constructed tent or "Shamiana", was preceded by a colourful procession of the 1,200 official participants in the Assembly. The Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox leaders from more than fifty countries, garbed in clerical and academic robes and a variety of national dress, marched from the Vigyan Bhavan Hall, where most of the meetings of the Assembly will be held, to the adjacent Shamiana.

The preacher declared that "our divided condition is partly due to the historical ways in which the Gospel has come to us". But, he added, "our continuance in these divisions, after we have come to see them as a hindrance to the Gospel, can no longer be excused on historical grounds. . . Our unconcern, or anxiety to preserve divisive walls, is also a witness; it is a witness to the fact that unity means little or nothing to us, because we ourselves have not been reconciled to God, and have not begun to share in the ministry of love and reconciliation".

"No theology will deserve to be called ecumenical in the coming days which ignores Asian structures", he said. "It may use the term ecumenical, but it will be parochial and Western only.

"This does not mean a disregard of the Christian heritage of the West. It means taking it seriously in an Asian setting."

"The synthesis of Oriental apprehensions of Christianity to the occidental structure of thinking will result in a comprehensive universal theology wherein the people will hear the Gospel in their own tongues", he concluded. EPS, Geneva

Youth to Present Intercommunion Plea

(New Delhi) - Ecumenical leaders will be called upon here to press for intercommunion between Christians of different confessions in the belief that "one baptism must lead us to one table".

This plea will be presented to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches on behalf of a group of 160 young people who studied the problem during a week-long conference at the Baptist Mission Compound.

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The statement pointed out that, since churches generally accept the validity of baptism administered by denominations other than their own, efforts must now be made for them to accept intercommunion.

"We believe that the issue of intercommunion cannot be isolated from the life of worship, witness and service of the Church", the statement declared.

"There are avenues of ecumenical growth open to us even though we do not yet have full intercommunion. On the other hand, to share in these aspects of ecumenical life without being able to meet at the Lord's Table raises the question of intercommunion between local churches and on an ecumenical level."

The statement called upon youth participants at the Assembly to accept the challenge presented at a conference of 1,800 European young people, held in 1960 in Lausanne, Switzerland. At that time, the youth deplored the fact that they were unable to gather at the Lord's Table together, and called upon the churches to work toward intercommunion at ecumenical gatherings.

"We consider that it is the obligation of all meetings of young people on an ecumenical basis to consider the advances made from time to time in intercommunion since the Lausanne assembly", the statement said.

It expressed concern that many churches "have not considered the Lausanne challenge at a high enough level", as they were requested to do by the WCC's Central Committee at its meeting in St. Andrew's, Scotland, last year.

A consultation on communion services at ecumenical gatherings was held last March under the joint sponsorship of the WCC's Youth and Faith and Order departments. The participants agreed that at such meetings "we have to find that arrangement of communion services which, while respecting the discipline of the churches and individual consciences, gives the fullest possible expression to the essential oneness of the Church of Christ which at such gatherings we confess together".

The statement drafted in New Delhi said: "We believe that the March recommendations should be accepted by the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches and by the youth departments of national councils for future youth assemblies. The recommendations, and the history behind them, should be a major part of the preparation of all delegates attending youth assemblies."

It further called upon the Faith and Order Commission to accept the recommendations of the March consultation "as the basis of a practice of intercommunion which represents the present stage of the ecumenical situation".

The statement concluded with the expressed hope that "the ecumenical encounter will be such a profound, disturbing experience as shall lead our churches into thoroughgoing renewal, not merely the placing of new patches on old garments".

EPS, Geneva

Assembly Asked to Expand WCC Work

(New Delhi) - Five major increases in the work of the World Council of Churches, involving an extra cost of \$218,860 a year, were called for at its Assembly. The budget, contained in the Central Committee's report on Programme and Finance, was laid before the delegates by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, stated clerk.

If the proposals are approved by the Assembly it will mean that the WCC's annual budget will rise to \$751,200 to cover its general budget.

Other World Council activities call for a service programme budget of \$1,106,000 to cover the basic operations of its Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, a tentative budget of \$201,150 for the Commission and Division of World Mission and Evangelism, and another tentative budget of \$110,000 for the work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

Six suggested increases in the general budget are:

1. The provision of \$28,000 to implement work on racial and ethnic relations and on religious liberty to be carried out by the Division of Studies.
2. The sum of \$15,000 for possible new regional developments.
3. An increase of \$10,000 to a total of \$30,000 in the annual allocation to the reserve for the next Assembly's expenses.
4. To provide for increased expenses in the new headquarters building now being built in Geneva.
5. The setting aside of \$25,000 against contingencies such as inflation.
6. The strengthening of departments and units, at an additional cost of \$144,860 to enable them to carry out their responsibilities more adequately.

EPS, Geneva

Central Committee Chairman Refutes Critics

(New Delhi) - Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, said that the total development of the ecumenical movement is the "most convincing refutation" of the notion that the World Council is trying to build a "super-church".

"We who are closest to the Council are constantly baffled how any such charge can be made or any such misconception can still exist, except in critics who are deliberately self-deceived", Dr. Fry told delegates attending the WCC's Third Assembly.

Reporting on the activities of the Central Committee since the last Assembly, in 1954, Dr. Fry said that there can be no question that the member churches themselves determine the course of the World Council.

"The World Council is not even an 'outside force', except to the degree that a church or churches keep it outside", he said. "If there is any failure of contact, the fault goes back to the structures that the churches have created or failed to create within themselves to keep in touch with the Council and give their guidance to it".

In the deliberations of the Central Committee, he said, the minority voice of even a single church is listened to with respect.

"Furthermore", he continued, "...this has been true not only of certain churches but of every and any one. Churches are esteemed in the World Council not only for their numbers or financial power or depth of history, but equally for the height of their potential and often even in proportion to the problems that confront and sometimes threaten to overwhelm them.

"...The World Council has never experienced a really calm day since it came into existence, not a single twenty-four hours on which it could be phlegmatic or relaxed or introverted", he said. "God has simultaneously called it into life and to strenuous action. For the World Council of Churches, it is more than merely a matter of being swept along by the rushing stream of history, it has momentum in itself.

"The Christian community, acting together, needs to feel an obligation nowadays to be the pathfinder. It will never again be enough for us to assume what has sometimes been called our customary role in the past, that of simply being critics after the fact. We need to guide or at least contribute to guiding."

"The one thing surest is that the ecumenical movement no longer, if it ever was, is the affair of a coterie of specialists. The policies of the World Council of Churches of today grow out of the collective wisdom; they represent the consensus of a swelling multitude of the trusted leaders of the churches all over the world."

On the financial side, he said, the WCC is "a notably frugal operation", in which "every rupee, franc, crown, pound. . .is carefully husbanded and cautiously disbursed."

EPS, Geneva